



Portraits of Patriotism

“Stand Your Ground”

CPT John Parker gave these orders to the 70 or so members of his Lexington Militia Company who stood against a force of several hundred seasoned British regulars. On a brisk New England morning, April 19, 1775, these American soldier-farmers defiantly went eye to eye with the professional soldiers of one of the 18th century’s foremost armies.

For 12 years, from 1763 to 1775, a long fuse of resentment had burned in the hearts of American colonists, fanned by British trade laws and enforced by British bayonets. That fuse now ignited a powder keg of armed resistance. Legend says that as the British advanced to disperse the rebels, Parker advised his men: “Don’t fire unless fired upon. But if they want to have a war, let it begin here.”

Who fired that first shot is unknown, but the result is depicted in this National Guard heritage painting by Don Troiani. As the smoke cleared from Lexington Green, eight Americans lay dead, nine wounded. Parker and the rest of his company then joined minutemen in Concord, later harassing the redcoats in their retreat to Boston. Tested again at Bunker Hill, the Lexington militiamen formed a company in the Continental Army.

Lexington stands alongside the battles of Yorktown, Gettysburg and the D-Day landings in Normandy as crucial moments of Army history. Over the years, by a variety of names — minutemen, state militia, volunteers, Guardsmen — companies of patriots have always answered America’s call in time of peril. This heritage continues today, where the Lexington Militia Co. is perpetuated in the 181st and 182nd Infantry regiments of the Massachusetts Army National Guard — American citizen-soldiers trained and ready to defend the nation in the new century. — *CPT Patrick Swan*

